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Webster favors cutback on spies

By John McCaslin
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FBI Director William Webster said yesterday that the FBI has sent recommendations to President Reagan on how to reduce the presence of Soviet-bloc intelligence officials operating in the United States.

"We cannot, with the resources that have been given to us, continue to deal with foreign hostile presence in this country, without doing one of two things — increasing the resources or reducing the presence.

"I happen to favor reducing the presence," Mr. Webster told a Notre Dame University alumni gathering in Washington.

"We've made a number of recommendations within the intelligence community ... and they've gone all the way to the top, and I expect before very long you will see the results of that effort forthcoming," said Mr. Webster.

Mr. Reagan in late June said the United States must "bring the number of [Soviet] intelligence officers to a more manageable number."

Mr. Webster said yesterday there are more than 4,000 Soviet bloc and other officials operating in the United States "and we know that approximately one-third or 40 percent of the diplomatic officials of the Soviet bloc ... have intelligence missions in the United States."

"The risk is severe," said Mr. Webster. "It's a pretty busy part of the FBI's work."

Mr. Webster cited recent cases of espionage penetrations in West Germany, Britain, and the United States, and said the problem is so widespread that there are similar cases "you have not read about and may not read about."



FBI Director William F. Webster

"It's a form of warfare that's going on" between Western and Soviet-bloc nations, he said.

To help curb the espionage war, Mr. Webster said, the United States should discontinue classifying such a large number of top-secret documents. At the same time, the number of U.S. personnel with top-secret clearance should be reduced to help prevent future spy incidents, he added.

"People driving around with secret material stashed in their trunk, that leave them around their house or leave them on their desk at night, have an ambivalence ... that preconditions them to be receptive to a money offer [from foreign intelligence officials] when they need it," said Mr. Webster.

On the other hand, said Mr. Webster,

convictions for espionage "are way up."

"We had three convictions in 1984, which is a lot more than the previous year. And we've had over nine convictions this year so far. At the same time there were eight arrests in fiscal 1984, and there have been 14 so far this year on espionage charges," he said.

Nevertheless, "it's very hard to get the American people sensitive" to the scope of the problem, said Mr. Webster.

"If you have any questions about whether the Soviets are interested in what we're doing, just drive by their embassy and look at the antennas and aerials that are up there," he said.

In a related matter, Mr. Webster told The Washington Times yesterday that he had not yet been served with a subpoena to testify in the trial of Richard W. Miller, the only FBI agent ever charged with espionage.

According to the Associated Press, Mr. Miller's attorney revealed in a Los Angeles court Tuesday that Mr. Webster was subpoenaed because of an interview he gave earlier this month in which he said FBI double agents are being used to keep Soviet spies off balance.

Mr. Miller's attorney said the subpoena and an accompanying affidavit were aimed at refuting testimony by an author, who said the FBI would never use its own agents to penetrate a hostile intelligence operation such as the KGB, the Soviet spy agency.

"I haven't mentioned his [Mr. Miller's] name or discussed any of the facts, and I don't know what it's [the subpoena's] all about," Mr. Webster told The Times.